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ABSTRACT

An attempt to determine educational needs in adult education in Commonwealth countries, particularly in Britain and Australia, this document focuses on the changing sociological backgrounds of students in existing programs. Identification of characteristics of a cross-section of the students suggests a direct relationship between parental attitudes toward education and adult interest in non-vocational, continuing education. Concluding remarks concentrate on determining the need to modify teaching methods and curriculums in light of the changing student body. (RL)

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THE ADULT STUDENT AND LANGUAGES

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Adult Education is regarded as a marginal activity stuck on to our education system somewhere between our leaving primary school and our going senile; we have to run it with meagre budgets, leftover facilities and other people's spare time. British adult education from which our ideas and systems derive was substantially a lower class, self-help movement meant to make up for the lack or deficiencies of primary education, and later of secondary and technical education systems. Once it may rightly have been called remedial education, but in this generation there has been a phenomenal growth of adult education in spite of the improvement and extension of primary, secondary and tertiary education. In fact it is quite evident the improvement in formal education which has led to the advance of adult education, and this contradicts the remedial theory no matter how true it may have been in the last century. As Margaret Mead sums it up "Now it is the elite among the adults of the educationally elite countries who 'go back to school'".[1] Though the situation is improving slightly all the time adult education has not achieved a recognised standing in this country. In spite of a well-reasoned submission sent by the A.A.A.E. to the Martin Committee there has been no real recognition of adult education in the Committee's report on tertiary education in Australia.

In spite of the post-war growth of adult education there has been little enough research into adult education, and methods of teaching adults in Britain or Australia (except, in Australia, in the teaching of English to migrants) and very little investigation of the most basic component, the adult student himself. Only such an investigation would show the important function that adult education is serving, the need for it, and therefore its importance. Language classes have shared in the post-war adult education boom to the limit of finance available, and in Australia have taken the lion's share of the post-television increase. In Britain there has been a big increase in languages in non-vocational adult education, but not so proportionately large as here because in Britain the rest of adult education has also increased immensely; also in Australia we were more isolated, and linguistically more insular than the English (and that is saying something) and in greater need of a language education expansion.

The expansion in our adult education language classes came only in the 1950s, this was given a general survey in my article in *Babel*[2], which Professor Bodi used for the basis of his argument at last year's A.A.A.E. Conference.[3] We have now had enough experience in this new language endeavour to make it worth

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while, and in fact necessary, to investigate what we are doing and how we should be doing it. There are three main fields in which investigation is needed — the Sociological, the Psychological and the Pedagogical. The distinction is one of convenience largely, as they are closely interrelated. The pedagogic field will be one of the main purposes of the rest of this seminar so I will deal with the sociological identification and characteristics of the students, and make some references to the psychology of the adult student relevant to the consideration of objectives and methods.

Our adult students are all volunteers, and may be presumed to have objectives of their own though we may question, if we choose, whether their stated objectives are adequate explanations for their enrolling. We have left volunteer students to sort out their own interest and join any class of their own choosing, and most of them would consider that their choice was an act of free will. But if we examined the characteristics of students we would have some reason for believing that they have been subject to a great number of social influences and pressures which have hedged them about and guided them to the point of choice, like siren voices in a supermarket.

Enrol a man in a class and tell him that he is now a language student and he will understand you, but tell him that he is a sociological phenomenon and he will be mystified, perhaps disturbed. The increased interest in adult education which has occurred in the most developed and educated sections of the world is not the product of a random decision of masses of free wills, it follows certain patterns and shows certain limitations. It is clearly a response to a new set of social circumstances by definite types of people. Whether they like it or not our students are sociological phenomena.

Research

There has been little real research into the adult education student population in Australia, I know of only two theses on the local scene:

Manuel Lacuesta did an M.Ed. thesis on C.A.E. Melbourne students before TV[4], and there was another M.Ed. on Sydney W.E.A., and Education Department evening classes students by M. B. Moroney, after TV[5]; TV was watershed of adult education in Victoria and most likely elsewhere. I started a survey in Western Australia in 1960 which was the basis of the article in *Babel* used last year by Professor Bodi who has set about collecting more data from interstate adult education bodies; when his material has been collated it will be the best coverage to date. As I have been in England over the past three years I would like to refer to some researches which appear most fundamental there, and which should prove relevant for comparison when we have the chance of doing comparable work here. Some attention will be given to language students, but the principles

would apply to research in general. Our adult education ideas as well as our older social ideas were of British derivation and we have something to learn from the way our practice has diverged from the British, as well as the parallels in our development.

First, it is evident that only a small minority of the population is engaged in any form of educational or cultural voluntary activity. In what way are they distinguished from the general population? To start with they must have a favourable attitude towards education and some knowledge of what it means. A research by Trenaman[6] on representative London samples showed that only 10% of adults could be considered as having a sustained favourable attitude towards education. Their main distinguishing characteristic was that they had received good full-time education, as a rule, at least to English School Certificate. Then there was a group of 20% who had some secondary schooling or had done classes in their own time and who were reasonably favourable towards education. But interest in education was found to be not a graduated continuum becoming less interested in education as it got lower down the education scale; Trenaman found that there was a block of 45% who were not just uninterested in education but who were positively suspicious and hostile towards education, and "resistant to new ideas and higher values". This figure is depressing if we consider that adult education should have a general community enlightening function as well as the specialised function of educational extension and the refreshing of the well educated elites. Certainly adult education would never have achieved as much as it has over a century and a half without the conviction of the adult educationalists that they were carrying out a social crusade.

Secondly, it was found that adult education (and Further Education — the Ministry of Education's term for the less academic classes) was not substantially a remedy for deficient education, but a supplement for already good education. Contrary to a general belief it was found that there was not a clear distinction between the vocational and the liberal adult students; those who rated highest on vocational training also rated the highest on non-vocational, i.e. liberal and hobby studies. But there were also hopeful indications from this study; it was seen that in the younger generation a greater proportion of the under educated were taking part in further education of some sort.

My research was carried out on samples taken five years after Trenaman's in a northern industrial town.[7] These samples were of students in non-vocational adult education and further education classes containing a high proportion of language students. This work in Leeds does not contradict the London findings but reveals a few more things about the adult education population. The London studies showed that occupation was the best predictor of attitude towards education, if you ranked occupation according to the skill and intelligence it required. This table

shows the job-skill distribution calculated for the population as a whole, and the contrast with the job-skill distribution of adult education students in Leeds.

	Job Skill Levels				
	Prof'l	High Skill	Skilled	Moderately Skilled	Semi & Unskilled
	1	2	3	4	5 & 6
Leeds Ad. Ed. Stud'ts.	45%	23%	26%	5%	2%
National Pop'ln.	6%	13%	26%	26%	29%

Thus nearly half our students came from the top 6% of the population, in terms of skill, and very few from the lower half.

For the population as a whole, full-time education was the most influential factor in determining job-skill but within the adult eduaction group there was found a considerable amount of educational upgrading by part-time or interrupted study as shown in this abbreviated table, originally a six-point education scale:

Education levels of Adult Education Students in Leeds 1961-62

	Highest	Mid. High School	Minimum
	1	3	6
Full time Education	25%	21%	22%
Final Education Levels	39%	21%	9%

Allowing for the fact that there was a large group of young students included, it is most likely that this self-improving effect will ultimately be even greater. So while high job-skill is a most important factor in pre-selecting students it is not the sole determinant, the means by which they reached that skill are important for a significant number. It was also shown that the student population had a significantly higher job-skill distribution than their fathers. This use of job-skill tables is more valuable than old categories of "Manual" versus "White Collar" workers. Highly skilled manual workers *need* to be much more intelligent than Moderately Skilled white collar workers *need* to be.

We know that not all of the Professional and Highly Skilled groups joined in adult education classes, a significant proportion of the minority who did showed evidence of having previously achieved success by part-time education. This could explain how an interest in education became reinforced by success so that they continued with non-vocational part-time studies after they achieved their vocational goals, but it does not explain why they had the incentive to achieve the vocational success by study the hard way in the first place; most people do not try to. The evidence in this research is not conclusive but what there is tends to support the theory that a parental attitude of respect for education is an important factor in providing the adult with a sense of values which

becomes an autonomous drive, keeping itself going. Perhaps the end product is not just a sense of values but a personality type.

Language Students

At the same time as this Leeds research was going on Dr. John Lowe of Liverpool University was conducting a nation-wide pilot survey of adult education in England and Wales. I provided him with Leeds material, and as we were both interested in languages some interesting comparisons could be made. These are summarised in the book by the Lowes, husband and wife, *On Teaching Foreign Languages to Adults.*[8] The tendency mentioned in the adult education population is increased in language students. Language students are drawn more heavily from the highest educational and job-skill brackets in all the systems we sampled. There were virtually no manual workers in language classes and almost all students had some previous language training. In a dozen centres language classes had the highest proportion of students who had taken full-time education to 20 years and older. Nine-tenths of language students in the London City Literary Institute had at least a high school education.

But there were differences from one institution to another. Within Leeds itself the greatest number of language students in Evening Institutes were between 35-44 years but at the Swarthmore Adult Education Centre in Leeds most were in the range of 20-24 years. Both these sets of classes were provided by the Leeds county authority. Mid-way between these groups in age were the students of Russian in the University Extension Classes which lead to a diploma after three years; these were the most highly educated of all language students.

These Leeds classes were all regarded as non-vocational but when students were asked would the language help in their jobs

20% of all adult language classes said "yes".
40% of the Russian classes said "yes".

The most popular reason for languages in the whole student body was for travel, 33%, mainly the youngest groups, for many of whom this language was the first adult education class they had joined. Comparable to our Australian figures women dominated most classes two-to-one, except Russian and the oriental languages. It is important for us to note how many contrasts there are in these factors, age, education, motives, sex, etc., for we are in danger of generalizing on language students as a whole or lumping contrasting institutions together. In short, our investigations should be sensitive enough to show variations in these student factors, and our prescriptions should be specific to the types and needs of students, and designed to match the general standard of education prevailing in each distinct group.

Methods, and the Personality Factors

We have seen that educational background imposes a virtual breakneck hurdle limitation on possible student types, but that is obviously not the only major selecting factor otherwise the demands for classes would be ten times as great. Our adult

students come from within the group of requisite inteiligence, who have also had an adequate educational background but they are not a random sample or cross section of that group. Once those educational hurdles have been passed there are a variety of ways by which a person can advance themselves or gain personal satisfaction only some gain their fulfilment through books, the arts and evening classes. Non-vocational adult education has attracted in the past the more bookish and artistic types; consider what a high proportion of teachers and other formally educated professionals are in classes compared with the small numbers of business executives or administrators of comparable or higher, skill and intelligence.

Now that we are attracting to language classes a greater number of males with different types of motives, jobs and education (and I would suggest different types of temperaments or personalities) do we need to change our ideas of what would be study incentives and interests in classes, as well as changes in textbooks and methods? These questions are provoked by some evidence of using Eysenck's Primary Social Attitude Scale[9] on some Leeds students, far from conclusive but it could be important, and is worth pursuing. Again we might inquire whether we lose students because our traditional class room teaching is based on assumptions of individual, solo competitive effort. In adult education language classes we have recognised that a chummy community atmosphere helps students get over feelings of strangeness or isolation, but have we investigated how to use small group discussions and practice to create a feeling of mutual interest, and actually assist the learning process? Group discussion language courses are extensively used in Norway, and perhaps other places. Suggestions for finding the underlying *values* of a class of students as a basis for designing the course more appropriate to their interests have been made by Dr. Tom Coates, following research he did on English adult education students.[10]

The Social Purpose

That odd race of adult educationalists, the administrators, who generally could not teach a language to save themselves, have to be concerned with adult education as a whole, its broad sociological effect of creating an adult population mentally active and capable of comprehending new social and political needs, and meeting the challenges of adjusting to these needs. This social effect can only take place through a multiple of effects on individuals pursuing some personal interests or needs.

Languages have been very important in Australian post-war adult education; they have been demanded because of the new needs felt to communicate with and understand migrants, to engage in international business, political and scientific communication. But probably the bulk of the demand has come from those who do not have an immediate application of the skill but who have become aware of these factors as new influences in their lives, that is to say, they have become more international, more multiracial, and less insular in attitude (and about time

too). The more satisfaction this type of student gets from this language study the more reinforced these attitudes should become, but we should not dismiss the class failure dropouts as having gained nothing. Most, I would suggest, would take away an enlarged sense of the variety and complexity of man's cultures; and possibly be a little more tolerant of migrants struggling with elementary English. So adult education language teachers have an important part to play in enlightening of our community as well as merely instructing.

Collecting Basic Data

The most important basic student data should not be hard to collect on annual enrolment forms; the more heavyweight questionnaires suitable for thesis level research might only be useful every three to five years. Suggested data: *sex*, *marital state* and *subject* are necessary and generally shown but data which should be collected more carefully are: *age*, *occupation*: brief details should be asked for, so as to distinguish for example between Engineer, professional, and Engineer, tradesman, etc. Housewife and Retired are important categories in themselves but when these answers are given students should be asked for previous occupation. This information is enough to allow more accurate and more flexible categorizing, or rating of occupations according to skill, etc. Occupation should prove the most important information, the next most important, if space permits, is education.

Education: Age of finishing full-time education (this is better for comparison over the whole country and between generations than grade numbers), and final standards reached, degrees, etc. Both the standards reached and the way they were achieved might prove as significant as in England. When such data is available from all states we will have the basis for studies which will be of value nationally and to our individual institutions.

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